

Customer First Strategy



**Shetland
Islands
Council**

Introduction

Excellent customer service is at the heart of every successful organisation. Shetland Islands Council's Corporate Plan recognises this with the commitment "People who use our services will experience excellent standards of customer care".

Our organisation is funded to provide services to the public, but some of our customers are internal and this strategy applies to both. People, therefore, have a right to expect a certain level of service. Currently, customer service varies throughout our organisation with recipients reporting on both extremely positive experiences, as well as less satisfactory encounters.

Our 2017 customer survey provided this feedback:

(All percentages relate to the total number of people who chose to answer that question)

Top five highlights:

We asked...

- How would you rate the staff who served you and 82% said 'always or nearly always polite'
- What about the service you received? Almost 72% of those who answered this question said we always or nearly always provided a helpful and friendly service
- Think about your last contact with the Council; was it a positive or negative experience? 69% said their last contact was a positive one.
- When asked if there had been cause to complain in the last 12 months, 68% commented that they'd had no cause to
- 80% described the Council as easy to contact when they needed to

Opportunities for improvement:

We asked people's opinions on how good we are at a range of activities...

- 58% of respondents to that question said they felt we were poor or very poor at allowing residents to participate in making decisions
- 56% felt we were poor or very poor at learning from customer feedback
- 49% felt we were poor or very poor at listening to residents' views
- When asked to rate the service they received, 43% of respondents felt they'd sometimes, seldom or never witnessed an experienced and confident service in the last year
- 49% said they'd sometimes, seldom or never encountered a responsive service where we were able to resolve problems

The feedback and the SIC Values statement have acted as catalysts for change and have been used in the development of this Strategy and the Customer First Charter.

Why do we need a Customer First strategy?

1. To identify what the Council means by 'excellent standards of customer service'
2. To inform all employees of these standards, and of their responsibility to demonstrate them in their interactions with customers each day
3. To inform customers of our standards and what they should expect of us
4. To hold us to account should we fail to meet the required standards
5. To identify how the Council will measure and report on compliance with these standards

Bringing the Customer First strategy to life

1. When we talk about delivering a high standard of service we mean:
 - We will respond promptly when customers contact us
 - We will resolve issues as quickly as possible
 - We will be polite, helpful and professional at all times
 - We will treat everyone with equity and fairness
 - We will communicate clearly, avoiding jargon
 - We will maintain confidentiality, ensuring only those who need to see your information do so
 - We will take responsibility and rectify any mistakes we make
 - We will use our customers' views to help us improve the way we do things
2. These Customer Care Standards are expanded on in the Customer Charter, which identifies the standards the Council expects from staff.
3. The Charter also identifies what our customers can expect from Council staff.
4. If the Customer Care Standards are not met, customers have a right to complain. Any complaint will be responded to using the SIC Complaints Handling Procedure and Social Work Complaints Handling Procedure.
5. To inform ongoing opportunities for customer service improvements, compliments and complaints, customer survey and mystery shopping exercises will be used.

The Council's Corporate Management Team will have a regular agenda item to examine and learn from all forms of customer interaction.

We will also produce an annual Customer First monitoring report for publication that will highlight what we have learned from the ongoing review of our Customer First Strategy and, most importantly, what has changed as a result.

Conclusion

We're asking everyone to keep our new values in mind when working with our customers and with each other – excellent service, taking personal responsibility and working well together.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that every member of our team feels they have the right skills and information to hand to deliver the best possible service to customers. As an organisation, we're committed to improving customer service skills through staff training and development. A Customer First attitude means that we should be faster, more efficient and more accurate in our responses – so everyone should experience an all-round improvement.

We'll know we're getting it right when we're consistently delivering the commitments we've set out in our Customer Charter and when customers regularly tell us we're doing a good job.

There is no doubt that putting our customers first (whether colleagues or members of the public) will improve the experience they have when they interact with us.